

Week 7: Library and Information Science in Nigeria

Introduction

Library and Information Science (LIS) in Nigeria has evolved in response to the country's historical, cultural, social, and educational development. The Nigerian LIS profession reflects the broader struggle of the nation to provide access to information for education, research, and national development. Understanding the context of LIS in Nigeria is important because it shows how libraries and information centres contribute to literacy, knowledge creation, and overall national progress.

Historical Development of Libraries in Nigeria

The development of LIS in Nigeria is closely tied to the emergence of libraries in the country.

Pre-colonial era: Nigeria had an oral tradition of information transfer where history, culture, and knowledge were preserved through storytelling, proverbs, songs, and other oral forms. This formed the earliest “information system.”

Colonial era (1840s – 1960): Libraries were introduced by missionaries and colonial administrators to support evangelism, education, and administration. Mission schools often had small libraries.

Post-independence era (1960 onwards): With Nigeria's independence, there was a rapid expansion of universities and other educational institutions. This period saw the establishment of university libraries, public libraries, and later school libraries.

Establishment of Major Libraries in Nigeria

National Library of Nigeria (1964): The apex library in the country, established through the National Library Act of 1964, serves as the legal deposit library and the bibliographic control centre.

University Libraries: The first university library was at the University of Ibadan (founded 1948 as University College, Ibadan). University libraries now serve as the backbone of research and higher education.

Public Libraries: State governments set up public libraries to promote literacy, reading, and community development. The Enugu State Library (1954) was among the earliest.

Special Libraries: Libraries in research institutes, government agencies, media houses, and industries serve professionals with tailored information. Examples include NIMR Library (Lagos), NIIA Library, and CBN Library.

School Libraries: Although still underdeveloped, they were introduced to promote reading culture among children and young adults.

Development of LIS Education in Nigeria

Library education in Nigeria grew to support the need for trained professionals.

Early efforts: The University of Ibadan pioneered library training in 1959, establishing a Library School through UNESCO support.

Expansion: By the 1970s and 1980s, more universities introduced LIS programmes (e.g., Ahmadu Bello University, University of Maiduguri, University of Nigeria Nsukka, Bayero University Kano, etc.).

Polytechnics and Colleges: Diploma and certificate programmes in Library and Information Science are offered to train middle-level manpower.

Professional bodies:

Nigerian Library Association (NLA): Established in 1962, it is the umbrella body for librarians in Nigeria, regulating practice, promoting professionalism, and advocating for the role of libraries in national development.

Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN): Established by Act 12 of 1995, it regulates the practice of librarianship, accredits LIS schools, and maintains the register of professional librarians.

Contributions of LIS in Nigeria

LIS has played a vital role in:

1. Supporting education and literacy at all levels.
2. Providing information for national development and policymaking.
3. Promoting a reading culture among Nigerians.
4. Preserving Nigerian heritage and culture through archival and library services.
5. Supporting ICT-based information delivery through digital libraries and repositories.

Challenges Facing LIS in Nigeria

Despite its growth, LIS in Nigeria faces serious challenges, including:

1. Inadequate funding of libraries and LIS schools.
2. Poor ICT infrastructure and limited digitisation projects.
3. Low reading culture among Nigerians.
4. Shortage of professional librarians, especially in rural and community libraries.
5. Policy implementation gaps despite the existence of regulatory bodies.
6. Inconsistent government commitment to libraries as part of the national development agenda.

The Future of LIS in Nigeria

The future of LIS in Nigeria lies in:

1. Greater integration of ICT and digital resources in library services.

2. Development of institutional repositories and open access initiatives.
3. Strengthening of LIS education with global standards.
4. Stronger advocacy by NLA and LRCN for government commitment.
5. Expansion of school and community libraries to promote literacy from the grassroots.
6. Collaboration with international LIS bodies to improve practice.

Conclusion

Library and Information Science in Nigeria has grown from missionary and colonial beginnings into a professionalised discipline and practice regulated by national bodies. Despite many challenges, LIS continues to support education, research, and development in Nigeria. The future of LIS in Nigeria depends on innovation, government commitment, and continuous professional development of librarians.